

Message Text

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21

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8667

INFO USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

FBIS OKINAWA

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT CH

SUBJ: DEATH OF CHOU EN-LAI: FUNERAL LIST AND OBITURARY

REF: 75 HONG KONG 15026

SUMMARY: FUNERAL NOTICE AND OBITUARY FOR PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI, NOT UNEXPECTEDLY, WAS MORE EFFUSIVE AND LAUDATORY THAN THAT OF FELLOW VICE CHAIRMAN KANG SHENG WHO PASSED AWAY IN DECEMBER , BUT THE IDENTIFICATION OF LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM CHOU'S DEATH INCLUDED AN UNUSUAL REFERENCE TO "UPHOLD PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM," AND PEKING LEADERS SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO MINIMIZE HIS DEATH'S IMPACT BY HIGHLIGHTING DAILY OPERATIONS.
END SUMMARY

1. IDENTIFYING PREMIER CHOU'S CAUSE OF DEATH AS CANCER, THE NCNA JANUARY 8 OBTITUARY ANNOUNCEMENT ALSO REVEALED THAT CHOU'S ILLNESS DATED FROM 1972 - HE ENTERED HOSPITAL
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ONLY IN MAY 1974, FROM WHERE HE ONLY INFREQUENTLY REEMERGED.

CHOU'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUILDING BOTH THE PARTY AND ARMY WERE RECOGNIZED IN THE OBITUARY, WHICH WAS GENERALLY MORE EFFUSIVE THAN THAT OF THE LATE KANG SHENG, A FELLOW VICE CHAIRMAN (REFTEL). CHOU'S CONTRIBUTION TO "STRENGTHENING THE UNITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY FORCES" WAS MENTIONED, AND WE READ THIS TO MEAN ACCLAIM FOR HIS SUCCESS IN REOPENING CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS WITH THE WORLD OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS. HE AS ALSO PRAISED FOR HIS UTTER DEVOTION TO CHAIRMAN MAO'S LINE. STRIKINGLY, HOWEVER, THE OBITUARY NOTED A LESSON-LEARNING TASK FOR ALL TO "UPHOLD PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM" WHICH SMACKS OF A CALL TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AS DOES THE PHRASE CALLING FOR WINNING "VICTORY FOR THE CAUSE OF COMMUNISM". BOTH OF THESE CALLS WERE ABSENT FROM THE OBITUARIES OF KANG SHENG AND TUNG PI-WU.

2. STATISTICALLY, PEKING HANDLED THE EVENT IN SOMEWHAT UNUSUAL FASHION. FOLLOWING AN ABSENCE OF SEVERAL DAYS (HK 0213), PRC LEADERS RESUMED PUBLIC ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING CHOU'S DEATH. CHU TEH AND LI HSIEN-NIEN BOTH MADE EASILY RESCHEDULEABLE APPEARANCES, AND THE MINISTER OF POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS EVEN HOSTED A BANQUET ON THE EVENING OF 8 JANUARY. THIS CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH THE FORMAL ATTITUDE TAKEN DURING THE KANG SHENG MOURNING PERIOD WHEN WE PRESUME THE TRADITIONAL ARRIVAL-EVENING BANQUET OF PRESIDENT DA COSTA WAS POSTPONED FOR THAT REASON. WE SUSPECT THAT PEKING FOR BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN AUDIENCES IS ATTEMPTING TO PORTRAY A "BUSINESS-AS-USUAL" ATTITUDE TO LESSEN THE IMPACT THAT CHOU'S LOSS WILL HAVE AMONG THE LEADERSHIP.

3. THE FUNERAL COMMITTEE LIST REMAINED ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS, BUT LARGER THAN, THE LISTING FOR KANG SHENG AND TUNG PI-WU, IT HAS RANK LISTING DOWN THROUGH THE POLITBURO'S STANDING COMMITTEE AND A STROKE ORDER LISTING FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE POLITBURO GROUP. THE LISTING AT LOWER LEVELS CONFIRMS THE ELEVATION OF FORMER SZECHWAN SECRETARY LI TA-CHANG TO A HIGH-LEVEL PEKING POST--- POSSIBLY IN UNITED FRONT WORK-- AND IDENTIFIES THE CONTINUES ABSENCE OF FIRST MACHINE BUILDING MINISTER LI SHUI-CHING--- THE MINISTRY IS REPRESENTED ONLY BY A VICE MINISTER-- AND THE CONTINUING PUBLIC ROLE OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CRITICIZED CHOU JUNG-HSIN AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION.
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